

INFLUENCES OF THE AMERICAN
FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND IN
LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL
LEGISLATION.

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Federal Legislation.**

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Ruth P. Powers.

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It was at the Vinton Convention of the American Association of Workers for the Blind in 1921 that the American Foundation for the Blind, a central agency for nation wide service to the blind was established. For many years there had been a concerted effort on the part of workers in all branches of work for the blind to have just such an agency as the American Foundation. In the charter of the Foundation there are many important and vital provisions set forth but it is only the second provision in the charter that is to be considered here. Provision #2 stated that the Foundation was "to endeavor to secure local, state, and federal legislation for the welfare of the blind and the partially blind.

In order to understand what the Foundation meant by welfare, it might be well at this point to give some of the philosophy and thinking on the part of those who worked so hard to establish the Foundation. In 1907 Helen Keller said, "the heaviest burden on the blind is not blindness, but idleness and they can be relieved of this greater burden." This statement is as real today as when it was made and it was with this premise in mind that the Foundation worked toward educating the public to accept a philosophy of constructive help for the blind rather than destructive sympathy and to realize that except for the blind person's need of special services and opportunities, the blind person is not different from the seeing and it is equally important for the blind person to be a well adjusted individual with normal, satisfying, social and recreational outlets and with a training that will fit him to be economically independent as it is for the seeing person. The blind too have had to be educated as well as the seeing, "to look upon blindness only as an inconvenience and not as an insurmountable handicap."

Legislation for the blind existed many years before the Foundation was incorporated. Because blindness is so definite a cause of poverty special provision of public relief for the needy blind had long been demanded. The theory on which blind relief is based is that blindness itself is a sufficient-

It was at the Vision Foundation of the American Association of Workers
for the Blind in 1961 that the American Association for the Blind, a century
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blind to have just such an agency as the American Association. In the history of
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and Federal legislation for the welfare of the blind and the visually handicapped.
In order to understand what the Foundation meant by welfare, it is necessary
at this point to give some of the philosophy and thinking on the part of those
who worked so hard to establish the Foundation. In 1907 William Haller said:
"The greatest burden on the blind is not blindness, but discrimination. They are
a reflection of this greater burden." This statement is an excellent example
of the fact that it was with this attitude in mind that the Foundation was
founded educating the public to remove a philosophy of discrimination.
The blind person then has a right to be treated as a normal person for the
blind person's need of special services and accommodations. The blind person is
not different from the normal person and is as equally intelligent as the normal person.
As a well educated individual with normal, satisfactory work and recreation
activities and with training that will fit him to be economically independent
and as it is for the normal person. The blind person has the same right to be educated
and to the fullest extent possible to lead a normal life as the normal person has.
Legislation for the blind and the visually handicapped is to be developed
in cooperation. Federal legislation is to be developed in cooperation with
provision of public relief for the needy blind and visually handicapped. The
theory on which this relief is based is that the blind and visually handicapped

ly well defined cause of poverty to require special consideration at the hands of the state. There were various trends in the development of state legislation for the blind. One trend supported by both the blind and seeing alike was that special allowances are a sort of compensation for blindness and that all blind persons should be entitled to them regardless of need. Another group opposed this on the grounds that an allowance or pension for blindness would discourage industry and would tend to pauperize the blind individual and that the tax payer cannot be expected and should not be asked to contribute to the income of those who can maintain themselves without such assistance. This group favored the administration of such special allowances on the basis of need and termed them "blind relief". Still another type of state assistance to the blind was developed, which more nearly met the ideals of the majority of workers for the blind, this was the setting up of services rendered by state departments or "commissions" for the blind. In the early development of work for the blind privately supported agencies took the responsibility for the education of the young blind, the establishment of special workshops where capable blind people were given employment; then the teaching of embossed print and handicrafts to adult blind people in their homes. Gradually the usefulness of these activities was recognized by the state and in 1906 the first "Commission for the Blind" was established by act of the Massachusetts Legislature, a state agency supported from public funds for the purpose of locating blind persons, providing vocational training and employment for them according to their capacities, teaching them the use of embossed print and helping the newly blind to adjust to their handicap. From 1906 to 1931, 25 additional state departments for the blind came into being with powers as broad as those defined above, their purpose being to promote the welfare of the blind as independent, active, participating members of society. The American Foundation assisted in forming state commissions, made recommendations as to the standardization of the best kind of local and state legislation for minimizing the handicap of blindness without pauperizing the blind. In 1923 there were 14 State Commissions and

ly well defined cause of poverty to require special consideration at the hands of the state. There were various trends in the development of state legislation for the blind. One trend supported by both the blind and seeing alike was that special allowances are a sort of compensation for blindness and that all blind persons should be entitled to them regardless of need. Another group opposed this on the grounds that an allowance or pension for blindness would discourage industry and would tend to pauperize the blind individual and that the tax payer cannot be expected and should not be asked to contribute to the income of those who can maintain themselves without such assistance. This group favored the administration of such special allowances on the basis of need and termed them "blind relief". Still another type of state assistance to the blind was developed, which was nearly not the ideal of the majority of workers for the blind, this was the setting up of services rendered by state departments or "commissions" for the blind. In the early development of work for the blind privately supported agencies took the responsibility for the education of the young blind, the establishment of special workshops where capable blind people were given employment; then the founding of盲文 blind and handwriting schools for adult blind people in their homes. Gradually the usefulness of these activities was recognized by the state and in 1905 the first "Commission for the Blind" was established by act of the Massachusetts Legislature. A state agency supported from public funds for the purpose of locating blind persons, providing vocational training and employment for them according to their capacities, teaching them the use of embossed print and helping the newly blind to adjust to their handicap. From 1905 to 1921, 25 additional state departments for the blind came into being with powers as broad as those defined above, their purposes being to promote the welfare of the blind as independent, active, participating members of society. The American Foundation assisted in forming state commissions, and recommendations as to the administration of the best kind of local and state legislation for relieving the handicap of blindness without pauperizing the blind. In 1923 there were 15 State Commissions and

eight years later there were 25 not including Florida and Nebraska, which states had passed legislation to establish such state departments for the blind but had made no appropriation.

*Not Georgia
Perhaps Oklahoma*

In 1923 The American Foundation for the Blind helped to establish in Georgia the State Commission for the Blind by sending a representative to appear before a joint meeting of the House and Senate to urge the consideration of the benefits to be obtained by the successful passage of the bill for a Commission.

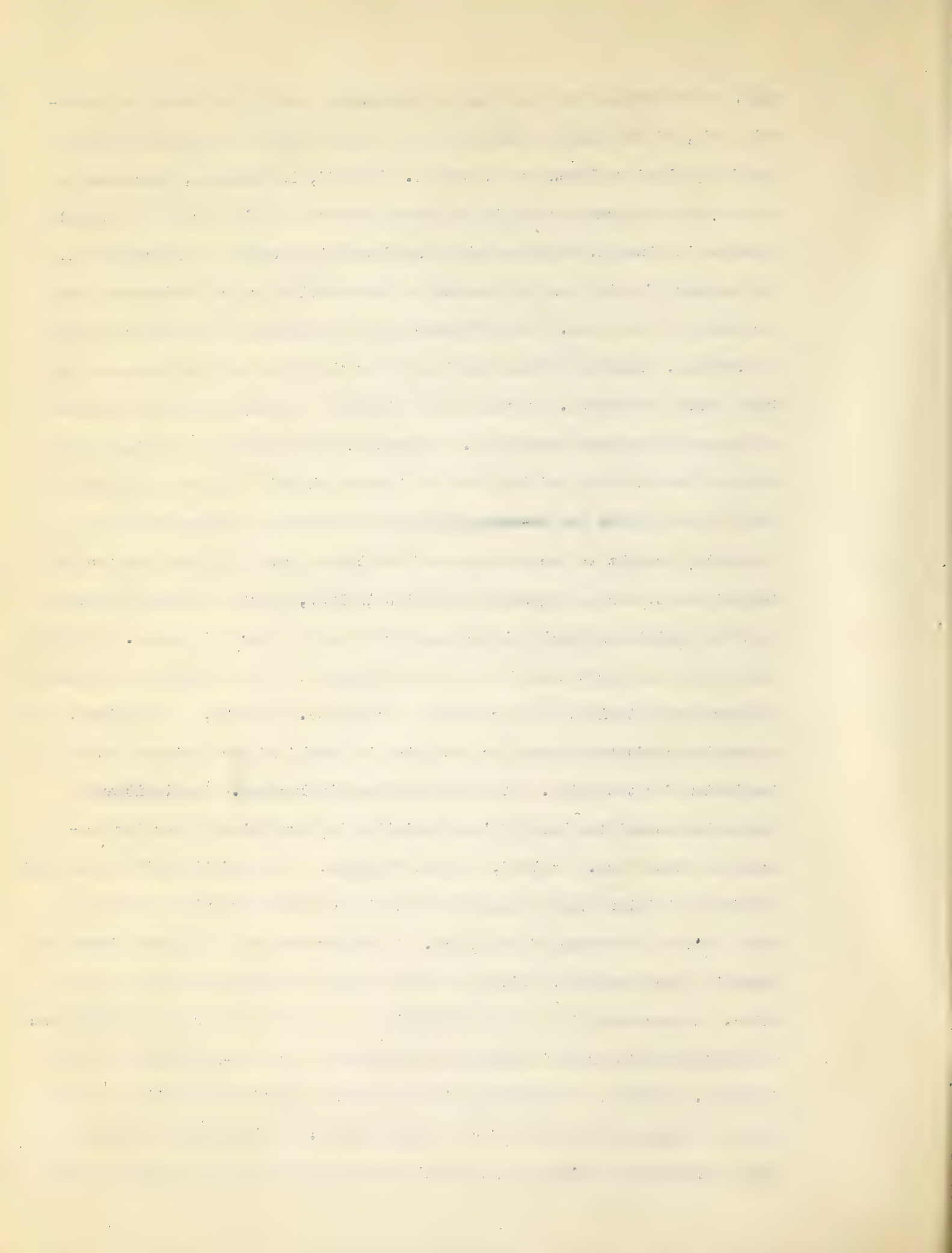
Did we?

In 1922 the Foundation aided in setting up the Virginia Commission. In 1923 *Minnesota* The *Minneapolis* State Department for the Blind was established with the purpose of giving service and relief, training, rehabilitation and preventive work for the blind. In 1923, Iowa was helped to set up a state commission for the blind and the representative of the Foundation was able to help in launching a campaign to arouse local interest and patronage in local workshops for the blind. The Foundation after once assisting in the setting up of a State Commission did not consider their work done; follow up work was often necessary to bring to the attention of the public the importance of adequately maintaining a Commission for the services needed by the blind. In Feb. 1924, in Virginia, a three day campaign was conducted by the Foundation in behalf of the Virginia Commission for the Blind and it was found that by action of this kind the need for increasing the state appropriation for the Commission's use for the blind was realized more fully by the public. Following the campaign of the Foundation, the Virginia Legislature passed a bill providing for the erection of a school for blind white children to be known as the Virginia School for the Blind. In 1925 at the request of the special committee appointed by the Governor of Colorado, the Foundation made a survey of the work for the adult blind of Colorado. Different forms of legislature were discussed by the Committee and the Foundation recommended that the present three state departments doing work for the blind be consolidated under one Commission. In 1925, in New Mexico, two days after a Foundation representative had appeared with the Helen Keller party before the New Mexico Legislature, at the request of the

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Supt. of the School for the Blind at Almorgarda, a bill was passed appropriating \$65,000 for adding buildings to the State School, to provide quarters for forty blind children not in school. In 1926, in Nebraska, there was no active state program for the blind so the Director of the Council of Social Agencies in Lincoln, Nebraska asked the Foundation to make an investigation, the purpose of which was to recommend a constructive program that would meet the needs of the blind. In 1917 there was a law passed by the General Court in Nebraska, creating a State Commission for the Blind to function under the State Board of Control. It was only active for five years and there had been no appropriation made since 1921. Conferences were held with leading state workers for the blind and the Board of Control showed interest and reported that if the objects for re-establishing the Commission were properly and forcefully brought to the attention of the State Board of Control and to the General Court, during legislative session in 1927, there is reason to believe that the Legislature will make an appropriation to cover this cause. The study made showed an urgent need for the establishment of some industrial training; later, teachers and materials were provided by the State. In 1926, in Louisiana, the Foundation conducted a Week for the Blind in behalf of the Louisiana State Commission for the Blind. It was educational in purpose. The Louisiana Commission sought the help of the Foundation in formulating a working program for State Work. In 1926, in West Virginia, the Foundation affiliated with the State Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation of West Virginia and made a study of the conditions of the blind. In cooperation with the State Board of Education the Foundation filed a bill to create a State Commission for the Blind. A representative of the Foundation was asked to be present at the time of the hearing to present the need of state work for the adult blind in West Virginia. In 1926, the blind people of Vermont urged the Foundation to take steps to organize state work for the blind there. In 1927, The Foundation held conferences in Alabama with local associations for the blind and plans



for a state program were formulated. In 1927 , the Foundation's efforts in Vermont resulted in a bill being passed by the Legislature creating a special department for the Blind ~~in~~ the Department of Public Welfare.

In many states the schools for the Blind were in the Department of Welfare, and the Foundation felt that the logical place for them was in the Department of Education. The Ohio Legislature in 1927 passed a bill over the Governor's veto transferring the School of the Blind from the Department of Welfare to the Department of Education. This was another victory for the Foundation and those who believed that the training of blind children did not belong in the field or sphere of charity.

In 1928, in Mississippi, ^{there was} passed a bill creating a State Commission for the Blind. It was the 22nd state to enact legislature in favor of blind people and this bill was drafted by a representative of the American Foundation. In 1928, Louisiana passed a bill creating a State Commission for the Blind. The Foundation had held educational weeks in various cities throughout the State a short time prior to the passage of the bill. In 1929, in response to an invitation from the Legislature of Florida, Helen Keller and a representative from the Foundation appeared before a joint session of the Senate and the House to plead for the passage of a bill creating a state commission for the blind. Legislation was unanimously passed. In the state of Kentucky in 1932, the Foundation undertook a survey of the blind in that state in cooperation with the State Board of Health and the Rotary Clubs. In 1935, in North Carolina, after great effort on the part of the Foundation there was a law enacted establishing a Commission for the Blind. In 1935, Oklahoma passed a bill for needy blind that was drafted by the Foundation.

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Prior to 1935 Texas was kept in setting up
a State Commission for the Blind but only \$1,000 was
made available for one year and this was insuffi-
cient to carry on any real program. The commission
also set up a Division for the Blind in the Board
of Education.

The material presented briefly then for merely
states that the Foundation influenced the wording
of the law or that the Foundation drew up legisla-
tion to ~~not~~ present to the legislative body. Statement
of this kind gave no conception of the amount of work
that was done by the Foundation in preparing
and organizing a state that had no provisions
for giving service or aid to the blind. Since the
enactment of the Social Security Act in 1935,
the states and the people have become so well in-
conscious that it is difficult to remember that
in previous years there was little interest or
little acceptance of broad social programs,
on the part of the majority. The Foundation despite
resistance and ^{general} lack of interest was able to
put across to many states their responsibilities
for providing special programs for the service

and aid of their blind residents. The establishment of Commissions seemed the best and logical way for the States to best serve their ^{blind} persons since they would then be state responsibility and state funds for doing the work that was needed. Further discussion of the work of the Foundation in State legislation will be given after a brief summary of the influence of the Foundation in Federal legislation.

Altho' the Foundation did not begin to function actively until 1923, work in the legislative field began closely following the organization of the Foundation and in 1922 the Director General of the Foundation reports that "in the name and with the authority of the Foundation he appeared before the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads of the House of Representatives in the interest of a bill which the American Bible Society had pending before Congress, the purpose of the bill to secure free transportation through the mails of the Scriptures donated or sold to blind persons by the Society." The Director General gave this as an example of the service the Foundation may render both to national

and local organizations for the blind in their effort to secure legislation.

In February, 1923 the Foundation in cooperation with others induced Congress to make a provision for the publication of Braille books for the blinded veterans. This was accomplished by having inserted in the appropriation for the Veterans Bureau, a clause authorizing that department to expend a portion of its funds for the embossing of Braille books for blinded veterans. The Director of the Research Bureau of the Foundation served as chairman of a Committee to select books and to suggest ways and means of getting the work done. As a result of the Committee's labors, a list of titles was agreed upon for embossing which met with universal approval. In 1927 the Foundation arranged for the introduction of a bill into Congress permitting railroads to carry a blind person and his guide for no fare. Railroads could not make this concession prior to the law because of the terms of the Interstate Commerce Act. The bill was passed; it was merely permissive leaving it entirely optional with the management of the roads as to whether they will extend this privilege to sightless travelers. As a

result of contacts made by the Foundation, many railroads now carry a blind person and a guide for one fare providing the Foundation will take the responsibility for recommending persons for this privilege and act as agent in the purchase of such tickets.

In 1930, the Pratt Bill, sponsored by the Foundation and introduced by Ruel Pratt, authorized the appropriation to the Library of Congress, of ^{\$}100,000 annually. The Library of Congress is authorized to arrange with local libraries at strategic points throughout the U. S. to act as branch libraries for the blind so that prompt and economical service may be rendered to blind people in every part of the country. The Library of Congress is further authorized to use this appropriation for the publication of books for the adult blind with which to stock these libraries. A bill identical with the Pratt bill as reported out by the Committee on the Library was introduced ^{into the Senate} by Senator Smoot and passed that body on May 12, 1930. The bill was finally known as the Pratt Smoot Bill and was passed by both Houses. In 1932, Senator Smoot introduced a bill into the Senate providing that the Secretary of the Treasury may grant to any blind

in dividing the privilege of maintaining a vending stand in any public building under the custody of the Secretary and under such rules and regulations as the latter may deem advisory. In 1933, the Pratt Smoot Law was amended to include the purchase of Talking Books for the libraries. The Foundation sponsored the amendment - In 1935, the Randolph Sheppard Law was enacted expressly authorizing blind people to conduct ~~such~~ ^{vending} stands under the supervision of the U. S. Office of Education. The Foundation for a number of years had been interested in trying to get the Federal Government, either through executive order or otherwise, to permit the blind to conduct stands for the sale of papers, magazines, tobacco products; also in the lobbies of post offices and other government buildings under proper supervision. Through its officers, the Foundation was successful in interesting President Roosevelt in this particular activity.

In 1935 when social legislation was sweeping the country the Foundation expressed in concrete terms the kind of blind relief law they would like to see enacted; laws which would ^{be} administered as part of a program of education, employment and social service; laws which would bring solace to the needy, serve to stimulate the capable and enlist the understanding interest of the public in the blind.

From 1929 to 1935 there was little progress made in developing state programs for the blind because of the depression and the resultant pressure on state legislatures to reduce expenditures. Budgets were severely cut, particularly in those states where the work was in its infancy and ~~no~~ no commissions for the blind were established in the states which had not previously made such provisions for the needs of the blind for eye care, employment and social adjustment were intensified by the depression. When the Social Security Act was introduced into Congress in January, 1935, workers for the blind saw, in the section providing federal funds for assistance to states in their programs for crippled children, what appeared to be a solution for this problem of inadequate support for state programs for the social and vocational adjustment of the blind. An amendment to the Act was drafted, which provided for federal funds to the extent of \$1,500,000 to be used for assistance to the states for their expenditures for diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions, vocational training, employment, home teaching, and other social service, and for special appliances and equipment used in the education, employment,

and recreation of the blind. This amendment was laid before the Senate Finance Committee and workers for the blind united to secure support for it. The Senate Finance Committee, however, incorporated in the Act when they reported it back to the Senate, not this amendment but another (the present Title X) providing \$3,000,000 for federal aid to the states in their programs for the of "aid to the blind," this term being defined to mean "money payments to needy blind persons." whereas the original amendment has followed closely the wording of the provision for crippled children, the substituted amendment was drafted along lines similar to those of Title I providing for old age assistance, a circumstance which exemplifies the wide difference in the concepts which lie back of the two amendments. Senator Wagner, sponsor of the Social Security Bill, offered another amendment from the floor of the Senate, providing that half of the proposed sum of \$3,000,000 be used for reimbursement of state expenditures for "locating blind persons, providing diagnoses of their eye conditions, and obtaining and employment of the adult blind." This amendment passed the

Senate but was stricken out by the Joint Conference Committee of House and Senate to which the Bill was referred. In the final form of the Act the use of Federal funds was limited to reimbursements for state programs of blind relief. Supporters of the original amendment believe that the primary consideration in the welfare of the blind is their restoration to social and economic independence, either by improvement or restoration of vision through proper medical care or if blindness is irremediable, through vocational training, employment, instruction of the adult blind in their homes, and adjustment of the newly blinded to their handicap. Financial relief is but one phase of such a program to be resorted to only as a temporary measure or when all else fails. The concept behind Title X, however, is that dependency is the general lot of the blind and monetary relief their primary need. In May 1935 when the Social Security Act was reported back to the Senate, 26 states had programs of relief to the needy blind in effect but not one of these programs met the requirements of the Federal Act. Some were rendered ineligible by the stringency of their res-

idence requirements, some by the fact that the blind relief
 was administered by the counties without the supervision
 of a state agency, some by the fact that the relief law was
 not state-wide and mandatory on the counties, some
 because there was no financial participation by
 the state. States hastened to take action to make
 themselves eligible for federal aid either by amending
 existing laws or by passing new ones.

Prior to the existence of the Social Security Act,
 the Foundation had recommended that aid and service
 to the blind be set up in a separate state commission
 with an advisory board of five or seven members who
 would administer ~~services~~ and relief to the blind
 apart from other governmental agencies or departments.
 Under the Social Security Board, for economic reasons
 of administration, the Foundation changed their
 viewpoint ^{or} and came to the idea of a Commission
 under the Department of Social Welfare, as it was
 felt this would insure greater cooperation between
 aid to the blind and services to the blind. States
 sought the advice of the Foundation in drawing
 up legislation that would make them eligible

for financial ^{supplementation from} federal funds. The Foundation in cooperation with the American Public Health Assoc ^{Michigan} created in January 1937, drew up legislation for the Social Security Board to issue to states as model legislation for aid to the blind. Michigan, New Mexico and South Dakota have passed this legislation. Recently the Social Security Board has prescribed the use of ^{Foundation's} standard record form in reporting the eye condition of all applicants for blind relief under the Social Security Act. This will eventually provide in the U. S. the largest body of data regarding the eye conditions of the blind ever collected, and will for the first time make possible a comparative study of the eye condition of the blind in various states - as well as a comparative studies of the eye conditions of the blind in the U. S. with those in Great Britain and in certain other progressive European countries. ^PThe Foundation believes that blind relief is most satisfactory when it is administered by a state agency as part of the total program for the welfare of the blind. This makes it possible to utilize relief grants as supplementary aid

during a period of vocational adjustment, to restore
 to the sighted world & to economic independence many
 who are unnecessarily blind their ignorance or neglect
 and to prevent the abuse of the relief law by those who
 could, if they would, support themselves by their own
 efforts. Other provisions which experience has dem-
 onstrated to be desirable in a blind relief law are;
 Administration by a state agency to insure
 uniformity of policy; partial financial responsibil-
 ity by the counties to insure local interest and a
 feeling of responsibility for the blind in the community;
 Administration on a sliding scale on the basis of
 individual need to ensure adequate provision
 for those who have no other resources and at the
 same time prevent an undue burden on the
 taxpayers; a flexible definition of blindness
 that can be interpreted on the basis of the prac-
 tical usefulness of any remaining vision
 rather than on a hard and fast measurement
 of visual acuity; the use of relief funds
 for restoration of vision and for vocational

training in order to reduce dependency wherever possible. None of these recommendations are inconsistent with the requirements of the Social Security Act, except for the fact that federal funds cannot be used to reimburse grants made for medical service or vocational training. The Foundation ~~program~~ ^{work} is still necessarily intensive if the states are to be helped and guided in setting up the best possible programs for their work for the blind. At present the Foundation is working in Montana, West Virginia, Kentucky and Arkansas, helping them to establish service programs to meet the needs of their blind population. It is hoped that the new state plans for aid to the blind will be developed in close coordination with a constructive program for the blind, preferably by placing the administration in the hands of a state department responsible for all phases of the welfare of the blind, or where this is impossible, establishing an active interrelationship between the relief division and the state department for the blind.

That 15 states still without any state supported work for the adult blind and with several others where the financing of such work is very inadequate, the problems involved in setting up such relationships are serious. Yet the extension of such constructive services as a complement to the blind relief program is essential if the blind citizens of these states are not to be forced to lead lives of idleness and dependency by the very law that sought to keep them.

Future work of the Foundation will, in part, lie in keeping the public and the legislators to recognize the program for federal aid for what it is - the first step in developing a well rounded program for the welfare of the blind - and to aim toward the goal of keeping the blind people of this country so that they ~~may~~ may take their proper places as independent self respecting members of the community.

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